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/From the Editor/

104 In his compilatory article, "Abkhazia and the Abkhaz," which is placed in this, sixteenth book of the Zapiski Otdiela, Mr. M. G. Dzhanashvili, in introducing Grusian and Askhaz words, has rendered them by means of the letters of the Russian alphabet, with the addition of two letters from the French alphabet (h and q) and one letter from the Grusian alphabet (ღ), in order to indicate the pronunciation of these words somewhat more accurately. The letter h is introduced by the author to indicate that the letter of the Russian alphabet, with which it stands is to be pronounced with aspiration; the letter q is meant to indicate the deep- guttural k, and the Grusian letter ღ for the indication of a sound somewhat similar to a combination of the Russian letters t and ts /transliterated as ts'/. At the request of Mr. Dzhanashvili, who had neglected to explain this in his foreword, the editor is bringing this to the attention of the readers in order to prevent any misunderstanding which might arise during the reading of the article "Abkhazia and the Abkhaz." /Only the transliterated form of the native terms is given in the translation; where the author has used a special orthography for native terms, a note will refer the reader to the foreign text. The remainder of the editor's note has been omitted, since it is not pertinent to this article./

/1/ Abkhazia and the Abkhaz
(Ethnographic Sketch)

Foreword

101 The Abkhaz have been known since ancient times. Pliny (29-79 A. D.) calls them absilae; Arrian (100-160 A. D.) calls them apsilai (აფსილაι); the old Grusian chronicles refer to them as aphshili and aphsari. The Abkhaz call themselves aphsua and their country aphsn; the present-day Grusians give them various names: abkhazi, apkhazi, aphkhazi.

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already collected for the writing of a full-size monograph dealing with the religious beliefs and customs of the K'art's, Ibers, and Svans. However, after some reflection I decided that the time was not ripe for such a task as some necessary data were lacking and I therefore decided to publish only the notes. Here and there, however, I have not been able to restrain myself from touching upon certain considerations and inquiries belonging to the larger plane, and these have overflowed in the form of footnotes.

The founders of Christianity, realizing that it was not so easy after all to eradicate from the consciousness of the majority of the population religious beliefs and rites observed for thousands of years, endeavoured to transform them, by wrapping them up in their own clothing and so adapting them to the Christian feasts and saints; thus they established their own annual festivals. Wherever possible I have followed in my account the established order of church festivals.

I should further point out that all the material herein described was collected in one village only, namely, Adzvibzha, in southern Abkhasia (the province of Abzhua), which, according both to Georgian and foreign (for instance, of the missionary A. Lamberti) historical sources constituted until the second half of the seventeenth century, part of Megrelia. This accounts for the fact that the Megrelian influence is so strongly noticeable. I think it is quite possible that some of the beliefs herein described may be capable of a different interpretation in Northern Abkhasia.

I begin my notes with Àyt'ar. In the first place, however, it will be expedient to explain my views on the chief deity *antswd*,* God.

Antswd is a compound word, consisting of *an*, "mother," and *tswa* (*ratswd*)—"many," which together denote "many mothers" or simply "mothers"; the word is thus in the plural form.[1] "In a formal or grammatical sense," says Dcharaia, "it is not an error; only the word 'mother' forms in the plural *dntswa* and 'God'—*antswd*, i.e. the difference is in the accent. But in colloquial speech both words,

* The underlined *tsw* is a trigraph representing a sound uttered with one articulative effort or breath impulse, of which the digraph "*ts*" represents the front lingual affricate equivalent to German "*z*" (*Zeit*, time), and the labial semi-vowel "*w*", the labialization of the preceding "*ts*". "*Tsw*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*ts*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet* (in Russian), Leningrad, 1928, p. 31. [Translator's Note.]

[1] It would be premature at this stage to enter into the question of the identification of the conception "god", in Abkhasian, with "mother", and any attempt to give a morphological explanation of the form, which is incontestably the plural in *-tswa*, with the aid of the Abkhasian word *ratswa* would be superfluous (see N. Marr, *Definition of the Language of the Second Category of the Achaemenian Cuneiform Inscriptions* (in Russian), in *Zapiski* (Bulletin) of the Eastern Branch of the Imperial Russian Archæological Society, St. Petersburg, 1915, §62. See also his *On the Origin of the Name Anapa* (in Russian). It is the usual linguistic method of the Abkhasians to interpret everything, even suffixes, such as the plural termination *-tswa* in the above instance, by means of the Abkhasian speech, with the aid of the Abkhasian words that survive to this day. [Note by the Editor of the *Kristianskii Vostok*.]

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'mothers' and 'God', are often pronounced in the same manner." [1] 196
"During the study of the different religious beliefs and customs of [190]
the Abkhasians," he continues, "we came across the following phrase among others: *antsw̌a* r-*mɔzɔzɔ*—'the cause, guilt of God' (properly, 'the guilt or fault of gods,' N. Janashia). The roman r is the pronominal characteristic of the third person plural. . . . The above quoted construction—*antsw̌a r-mɔzɔzɔ*—could not have been arrived at unless the word *antsw̌a* was used in the plural," justly remarks the author; "were it in the singular, we would have had *antsw̌a i-mɔzɔzɔ*."

Abkhasians regard the elements and manifestations of nature as rational beings. Each of these rational beings has his own gods, whom the orthodox Abkhasian serves honestly, in the light of his understanding. If the name of one, or more, of these gods has been forgotten by the people, he, the god, is simply called *inkhw̌**—"his 'part', 'share' of mother," or they use the full form *intsw̌akhw̌*—"his part of God," while under the influence of Christianity—*inɔkhakhw̌*, in which *akhw̌* denotes "part, share, dole" and *anɔkha*—"icon." [2]

In Abkhasian conception, God is One, but He is of infinitely numerous "doles" or parts. Not only each manifestation of nature, but also each tribe, family, or individual, has his own part of God, just as each Christian has his guardian-angel. The Abkhaz says *sɔntsw̌akhw̌*—"my (*s-* is the pronominal characteristic of the first [193] person singular) part of God"; *untsw̌akhw̌*—"thy (*u-* is the pronominal characteristic of the second person singular) part of God." And it should be noted that one may offend against not only one's own "part of God", but also against "the part of God" of one's neighbour, or relation, etc. . . .

This conception of the Deity as a multiform being appears to account for the fact that the word *antsw̌a* is in the plural. Here I will [191] note that such a conception evidently did not prevail among the Abkhasians only; its traces remain to this day even among the

[1] P. Dcharaia, *On the Relation of the Abkhasian lang. to the Japhetic* (in Russian) in *Materials for Japhetic Linguistics*, St. Pb., 1912, vol. iv, p. 65. 104

* The combination "*khw̌*" represents a sound uttered with one breath impulse. The underlined "*h̲h̲*" ("*k̲h̲*") constitutes actually a trigraph in which the digraph "*h̲h̲*" represents a guttural fricative equivalent to German *ach-laut*, and the *linea subscript* a hard diffusive glottal spirant, which is not to be identified with the palatal (front) "*h*", and which is represented elsewhere, independently, as "*h̲*"; the combination "*h̲h̲*" (= *h̲h̲* + *h*) is thus a deeper guttural, glottal, sound than the German *ach-laut*. The labial semi-vowel "*w̌*" represents the labialization of the preceding "*h̲h̲*". "*K̲hw̌*" thus represents a labialized variety of "*h̲h̲*". See N. Y. Marr, *The Abkhasian Analytical Alphabet*, pp. 48 and 39; see also his *Abkhasian-Russian Dictionary*, Leningrad, 1926, pp. XXXV–XXXVI. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[2] I. Javakhishvili derives *anɔkha* from the Georgian word *khati*, icon. May not *khati* be derived from the Abkhasian verb *akha'ara*? *A-khə*, head, *a'ara*, to give, to set, to level the head. Or is it a mere consonance?

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which is *Khetsia*.[1] He has one sister from whom descends the demon family; that is why *antswà* has no right to destroy once for all the demons, his blood relations.

The Abkhasians appear to have made their gods after the image of man; one and the same god can be both good and evil in relation to a given person, according to the zeal with which he fulfils his duties towards him. The only means by which an angered god can be placated is by open-hearted confession and sacrificial offerings. And as the Abkhasians have a great number of gods their whole life is passed in continuous prayer and offering to gods.

I. Àyt'ar-nɔ̀hwa*

1. *Jabrán*

The Abkhasians make preparations for Shrovetide with particular solemnity, for its approach coincides with the observance of a series of religious rites and offerings, known under the general name of *Àyt'ar-nɔ̀hwa*. Àyt'ar is a great god of procreation and fertility, particularly with regard to the breeding of cattle. He is, as we shall see presently, the head of a whole pleiade of gods, who appear to be subordinate to him, and each of whom constitutes a part of him. *Nɔ̀hwa*, which is derived from *a-nɔ̀hwara*, to pray, denotes praying, prayer, whence *Àyt'ar-nɔ̀hwa*, meaning prayer, offering, to Ayt'ar.

The first in order of offerings is that performed in honour of the god *jabrán*, i.e. god of the goats (and sheep) (see above, p. 120).

On the Sunday, the last day of Shrovetide, the eldest woman of the family leavens dough from the flour of *ashɔ̀* (Georgian *shvria*, oat)[1] and places it in a warm corner. The dough is often kneaded with a stick, called *adswɔ̀*,† made specially for this purpose from the hazel tree, on account of which the dough itself is called *adswɔ̀sa*, a combination of *adswɔ̀*, a stick with a tapering end, and *àrsara*, to knead.

On the Shrove Thursday the eldest woman of the family—*aṗ'hwɔs-tsk'ya* ("woman pure")—takes a portion of this leaven, kneads it with the stick, adds some water and flour, boils it, and then bakes maizebread—*amgyal*. This maizebread must be baked on a hearth.

* For the pronunciation of "h" see p. 119, n. *. The combination "hw" represents a labialized variety of "h". [Translator's Note.]

† The combination "dsw" which is to be pronounced with one breath impulse, represents a labialized variety of "ds". For this latter sound see p. 329 (ṡ). [Translator's Note.]

[1] N. Y. Marr, *On the Religious Beliefs of the Abkhasians* (in Russian), in *Khristianskoe Chtenie*, "The Christian East," St. Pb., 1915, vol. iv, issue 1, p. 138.
(A translation of this work is given in this number, pp. 157–180, see p. 171. Ed. *Georgica*.)

[1] It should be noted that in all these sacrificial offerings oat flour and, on rare occasions, millet flour, is used. Without this flour or unless it is at least used as an ingredient the offering becomes inadmissible. The reason for this is probably because *ashɔ̀* (and *ghomi*, millet) alone constituted the staple food.

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Georgians. Thus, according to Iv. Gv. Gomelauri, the well-known pedagogue, in K'iziqi (Signakh district, in Kakhet'i) they say: *tchemi dsili ghmert'i; zheni dsili ghmert'i*, "my part of God," "thy part of God." A. Dsuladze, who is well acquainted with the life of the Gurian people, told me that similar expressions were also used in Guria.

Further, as the reader will see for himself, the word *an*, "mother" constitutes part of the names of a series of gods, and several of these names are of the feminine gender, as Dcharaia has also justly noticed. In this connection I should like to direct the attention of the reader to the names of two gods, namely, *jabrdn* and *zhwabrdn*.* Each of these words has in our opinion several connotations; *jabrdn* is compounded of several words: *j* is the root from the word *a-j-ma*, a goat; *a-b*, father; *r* the pronominal characteristic of the third person plural; and *an*, mother. Thus *jabrdn* denotes "father and mother of goats", i.e. "(fore)parents of goats", or "god of goats". In the same manner *zhwabrdn* is compounded of *a-zhw*, a cow, and of the components just explained, so that the whole denotes "father and mother of cows", i.e. "(fore)parents of cows".[1] It seems to me that at the dawning of their religio-philosophical life, the Abkhasians evidently worshipped equally both their male and female ancestors. How strong is this ancestor-worship among the Abkhasians even to-day will be shown in my work *The Ancestor Cult*.

Thus, as is the case of Dcharaia, I think that the word *antswd* is derived from the word *an* in the plural. I also think that the name *antswd*, of the Supreme Being, arose from the deification of ancestors. At first it was evidently used with the plural termination, and in the feminine gender, and later, in the course of time, from "many mothers-gods" arose the One God *antswd*.[2] The changing of the gender of gods is often observed in the religions of the primitive peoples, and *antswd* therefore constitutes no exception.[3]

Antswd is One, but He is plural as to His parts. All the gods, of which we will speak below, are subject to and obey Him as the Supreme Being. In the tales, I was told, it is said that *antswd's* mother came from a Megrelian princely *gvari* of Mkheidze, the Abkhasian form of

* The combination *zhw* is to be uttered with one breath impulse; it represents a labialised variety of "*zh*" (= French "*j*"). Cf. "*tsw*", p. 118, n. *. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] Such a morphological interpretation does not appear admissible, as the word *an*, if in this case it denotes "mother", is never combined with *ab*, father, but governs the first part of the compound word, *jab* and *zhab*, which, judging from the relative infix *r*, is assumed to be plural. [Note by the Editor, *Khr. V.*]

[2] And not *antswa*, as it should have sounded and does really sound "mothers". See above, pp. 118–19. [Ed., *Khris. Vos.*]

[3] If this supposition turns out to be justified, and the word *antswd* is not of Sumero-Babylono-Assyrian origin (from *An*, *Ass*), its significance as a term employed in the history of religious beliefs generally will be greatly increased.

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When the woman places the dough on the hearth, she holds over it a pure *sulguni* (a round of cheese),[1] from the centre of which she cuts out a small round piece and places it in the middle of the maizebread; with the exception of this middle part, the maizebread is lenten. When placing the dough on the hearth, she scatters bits of it, first in the direction of the sea, and then towards the mountains; and, as if calling to the goats, she says, *reyt, reyt* (the goat call), and mutters the following prayer: "Thou, *jabràn*, the great part of the great god (*Àyt'ar intswakhwodù jabràn*)! Grant us the warmth of thine eyes and of thy heart. Be the guardian of our herds! Bear goodwill unto us so that no harm should befall our herds, except their old moulted wool and old dung!" Apart from this introduction, which is always used, each says an improvised prayer. After this is over, as if calling to the goats they again exclaim, *reyt, reyt*, turning alternatively towards the sea and the mountains.

When the maizebread is baked, and the goats have returned from the fields, the eldest man in the family prays to god *jabràn*, muttering approximately the formula quoted above. The whole family joins him in uttering *àämen*, and the candles are lighted.

It is to be noted that during the prayer the participants also invoke the "god" *mkyamgaria*,* and say: "May thy bounty never fall short on us." It seems to me that this deity is no other than the "Megrelianized" angels Michael and Gabriel (Geo. *Mik'el da Gabrieli*), with whom Christianity endeavoured, in vain, to replace Àyt'ar and his "parts" of gods; up to this day the pagan deities still take precedence, although they also pray to *mkyamgaria*.

The maizebread is first cut into four parts with two strokes of the knife, and only afterwards into small pieces; the neighbours are not forgotten either, a piece being sent to each. The maizebread is baked in rhododendron (*à-k'wazhwa*)† leaves.

2. *Zhwabràn* (god of cows)[2]

This rite is performed in the same manner as jabràn. The prayer begins thus: "Thou *zhwabràn*, the great part (of the great deity)

* The palatal or mid-lingual semi-vowel "*y*" in "*k'y*", "*gy*", as also in "*ky*", "*wy*", "*shy*", "*qy*", etc., met with in this article, lingualizes or iotises the preceding consonant sound, the combinations "*k'y*", "*gy*", etc, representing lingualized or iotised varieties of "*k'*", "*g*" (pronounced hard, as in "go"), etc. For the pronunciation of simple radical sounds see p. 328. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

† See p. 131, note *.

[1] In Abkhasian *tkhyarshwa*, pure cheese; cf. Megrelian (I. Kipshidze, *The Megrelo-Russian Dictionary*, s.v. *aut'ari*) *tsk'ebva*, which is also an Abkhasian expression, denoting "pure (*a-tsk'ya*), good (*à-kwa*)".

[2] In Guria this observance is known under the name of *kuloba* (an abstract form of *kuali*, cowhouse) or *ilorioba*; the latter probably has some connection with St. George of Ilori. The Gurians often call a cow *ilora*. In Megrelia the god of cattle-breeding is known as *Zhini-Aut'ar*.

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The Megrelians also know this septenary, *shk'vit'-ul-i*, in honour of which the majority of families let loose a cow with a pierced ear. Her milk is not used for food. The bullock is offered in sacrifice, while the heifer is reared. The well-known Pshav *Kviria* is, perhaps, related to Megrelian Àyt'ar. I have pointed out above that among the Megrelians the god of cattle-breeding is called *Zhini Ant'ar*. *Ant'ar* is the Abkhasian *Àyt'ar*, while *zhini*, in Megrelian, "high," "heavenly," is equivalent to Abkhasian *khikh*. The Abkhasians, however, appear to have split up *Zhini Ant'ar* into two gods, *Àyt'ar* and *Khikh*. They appeal for help to the latter in the spring, when the cattle are taken to the mountain pastures. They pray to him under the shadows of trees. On four pillarets are placed poles, which are covered with leaves of trees, particularly of the wild hazel tree, the oak, or yoke-elm. A cheese curd wrapped in chestnut tree bark is placed on this table (*ashwamkyàt'*)* which is covered with greenery; on it is also placed *àtchamak'wa*, a kind of millet porridge, cooked with cheese. In front of it is also placed milk gruel. Women are not allowed to be present. The head of the family, standing with uncovered head in front of this green table, called *ashwamkyàt'*, prays that *Khikh*, the great part of the great deity Àyt'ar, may increase his cattle and send all good things. While praying he spills a little of the gruel towards the sea and towards the mountains, uttering *wootsw*. The prayer over, he takes the cheese curd and passes over it cross-wise a hazel "knife", which is really a stick cut into a tapering, knife-like shape, after which he actually cuts the cheese curd with a real knife.[1] This ceremony of prayer is followed by a dinner, the remains of which are not cleared away. Three of the supports or legs of *ashwamkyàt'* are cut off (each with one stroke), the fourth remains there untouched. It seems to me probable that the table itself received its name from this act of cutting. Megrelians also know this *ashwamkyàt'*, which they call *sumket* (*sumi keti*), "three sticks," derived, perhaps, from *sumkvat'*, in which case it would denote "three cuttings" (*kvat'* < *kvat'ua* = to cut, to fell), i.e. "cut with three strokes."[2]

The Georgian Mountaineers also have their *Anaior-i*.

(c) *Alòshkintr* (*alòskintr*).

These cakes are also put aside. The prayer now takes three new

* The combination *shw* represents a labialized variety of "*sh*"; cf. "*shw*", p. 120, note *. In *ashwamkyat'* the "*sh*" is not only labialized, but also lingualized or lotized, which lingualization is not, however, represented in the transcription. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] By using the wooden knife, the Abkhasian probably pays tribute to that very ancient time when his ancestors used that kind of knife.

[2] If the first part *shwum* represents the Megrelian word "three", one should keep in mind not the "K'art'lianized" form *sumi*, but the original, Tubal-Kainian *shumi*; see Marr, *From the Journeys to Svania* (in Russian), in *Khrist. Vostok*, ii, pp. 17–18. (Editor, *Khrist. Vost.*)

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1796 *à-khwazhw* and entreats god *Alèshkintr* to grant the house faithful dogs—those best friends of man and reliable watchers of his weal; the prayer at the same time spills some of the hot *a-k'warəpà* or *a-*
[929] *k'warpà* (a thick broth of *à-khwazhw*, or millet) towards the sea and some towards the mountains, uttering "*Wootsw!* Burn out the tongue
[958] of the evil-speaker, the eyes of the evil-eyed", and continues his prayer.
[916] In the opinion of the commission, *Alèshkintr* is also "part" of *Àyt'ar*. *Ala* denotes dog; *shkintr*, however, is incomprehensible.

The commission explained that "dog" was mentioned before
[23] "man" on account of the former being more capable of loyalty to a master than the latter.

671 It should be noted that the common law values the blood of a
685 dog in proportion to that of its owner; the blood of a baron's dog is
825 equal to that of a baron, of a peasant's to that of a peasant, etc.

539 From the lips of K. Dolbaia (Abkh. Delba), an 80-year-old Abkha-
231 sian, who possesses an expert knowledge of the Abkhasian language, I wrote down the following tale:—

"In ancient times, when Abkhasia was inhabited by giants and devas (daevas), Aslan, one of the giants, would not leave the devas in peace. Once, when he was asleep, the devas crept up stealthily, bound him with silk laces, blinded and killed him, and threw him into a pit as deep as a well. On their return from their usual hunting expedition, his dogs discovered their master, but they could not pull him out of the well. They fell upon an ox-cart driver who happened to be passing by, and compelled him to rescue their master from the well and unbind him. The dogs licked Aslan for three days and three nights, and so brought him back to life and restored his sight." [1]

The following superstition prevails among the Abkhasians. If
[807] someone, noticing the heavens bursting open, succeeds in uttering *Làri, vàri, khazò, jkhwàri*, he will have all his wishes fulfilled. Only one woman was honoured with this great good fortune, the widow of a Mukvabba. *Làri* is interpreted as *lala* which denotes dog; *vàri*
[192] (*wàri* from *aowyò*,* man) as man; *khazò* as whey; *jkhwàri* as the crust of millet porridge; uttered together they are supposed to mean "make me rich". My Abkhasian advisers repeatedly emphasized that the dog was mentioned first because of its unexampled loyalty and fidelity to man, his master.

1796 (*d*) *Amza-nokwa*, Prayer to the Moon.
1796 The supplicant takes the moon-shaped cake and says: "Thou,

* See p. 122, note *. According to Marr, the throat participates vigorously in the pro/nuction of this composite or diffusive sound, and in a way as if the sound of the guttaral " ɜ " (the ancient Arabic *'ain*) were also heard. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[104] [1] The Academician N. Y. Marr has kindly directed my attention to Moses of Khoren, who describes how by order of Semiramis, the dogs of *Ara* (cf. *Alèshkintr*) licked the corpse of *Aru* or *Arwis*, the Armenian Prince, in order to revive him.
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1. *Adzɔrgə-khwasha*

Either during the night before *basioba*, or, according to some members of the Commission, on the Wednesday evening of Passion-week, is observed the rite of binding legs with wool threads. Having supped early, the family retires to bed, each individual thrusting out his or her right leg from under the blanket. The eldest woman in the family stands on a stool in the middle of the room, and spins thread from wool. She does her work in silence. Having spun the required quantity, she quietly approaches the beds, and binds with this thread the right leg of each of their occupants, murmuring: "May God grant thee to see such days for a hundred years!" *Adzɔrga* (more correctly, *adzɔga*) denotes a thick thread; *a-khwasha*—Friday, so that this rite was in former days, probably, observed on Fridays. The threads were afterwards burnt on the fire under the small cauldron in which was boiled the meat of the sacrificial animal, on Easter Day.

2. *K'wab-gharghar*[*]

As soon as the binding ceremony was finished, the woman seized a copper cauldron, or a copper basin, and struck it like a gong, shouting at the top of her voice: "We have beaten! We have beaten!" The whole family then ran out into the garden, shouting *shwahk'wat'weyt!* "We have beaten you (outstripped)!" The "beaten" neighbours, annoyed to find themselves "beaten", immediately fell upon them, and a mock battle ensued. The battle was fought, of course, entirely as a joke, and with great merriment. In ancient times, a whole village often went to "battle" against another, beating copper cauldrons and basins. The "battle" was followed by dances and fun-making continuing till the dawn. *A-k'wab* denotes cauldron of copper, *gharghar*, knock, rap, clatter of a copper cauldron or basin.

3. *Aqat'wava*

This Abkhasian term denotes the following superstition: an Abkhaz considers it a great misfortune if he hears the warbling or chirping of a swallow or the call of a cuckoo, before he has had his breakfast (or has at any rate partaken of salt); the bird will have "beaten" him, and this he regards as a great misfortune. In order to avoid this he eats salt, or something salt-flavoured immediately on rising from bed, which means that he has won the "contest".[1]

[*] The labial semi-vowel "*w*" in "*k'w*", "*t'w*", as also in "*hw*", "*tw*", etc., met with in this article, labializes the preceding consonant sound, the combination "*k'w*", "*hw*", etc., representing labialized varieties of "*k'*", "*h*", etc. [TRANSLATOR'S NOTE.]

[1] Georgians also have such a superstition.